



Interim COVID-19 Contact Tracing Instructions for Local Health Departments

October 28, 2020

Contact tracing is the systematic identification and monitoring of all persons who were exposed to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 during their infectious period. Because these persons are at risk of developing disease and spreading the virus, contacts should be quarantined by the local health department for 14 days from the last date they had exposure to a confirmed case.

Timely and thorough contact tracing can effectively interrupt the chain of disease transmission and is an important public health intervention to prevent or contain an outbreak. For COVID-19, Division of Public Health (DPH) recommends contact tracing for contacts of all confirmed cases (individuals who have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19). All contact tracing documents for COVID-19 refer to close contacts of confirmed cases.

Close contacts are people exposed to a person with COVID-19, as defined in CDC Guidance.

All symptomatic and asymptomatic contacts to confirmed cases shall be identified, notified of exposure, referred for COVID-19 testing and provided guidance on the requirement to quarantine.

The COVID Community Team Outreach Tool (CCTO) tool has been developed by NC DHHS as the NC EDSS proxy for the collection and reporting of required information regarding the notification and management of individuals exposed to COVID-19. Therefore, identification, notification, and completion of the isolation/quarantine period must be documented in the COVID Community Team Outreach (CCTO) tool.

The goals of contact tracing are to:

1. Rapidly identify all contacts, monitor for symptoms and arrange for testing as appropriate,
2. Ensure linkage to medical evaluation and care if the contact becomes symptomatic, and
3. Ensure immediate isolation or quarantine precautions are implemented.

When a confirmed case of COVID-19 is reported in your jurisdiction, please use these instructions and the CCTO tool to identify and monitor all close contacts of the confirmed case-patient.



The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the 5 major contact tracing steps: Case Investigation, Contact Elicitation, Contact Notification, Contact Monitoring, and End of Quarantine.

Within each of the 5 steps, we have provided supporting information including best practices from CDC guidance. Please contact the DPH CDB at 919-733-3419 should you have questions on this guidance. For questions about the CCTO tool, please email Covid19CTToolQuestion@dhhs.nc.gov.

Description of the 5 Contact Tracing Steps

1. Case Investigation: Case Investigator* contacts the COVID-19 confirmed case-patient to document symptoms and underlying health conditions, confirm patient was notified of positive test result, and provide isolation guidance.
2. Contact Elicitation: Contacts are elicited from case-patients through interview. All close contacts are entered into the CCTO tool by the Case Investigator and assigned to a Contact Tracer* for outreach.
3. Contact Notification: Contact Tracers perform initial outreach via phone, digital attempt (e.g., Email, Text) or in-person field visit to contacts who were in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Contact Tracer recommends testing and facilitates testing when needed and provides quarantine guidance.
4. Contact Monitoring: Contact Tracers identify and facilitate the provisioning of basic resources necessary to safely and successfully quarantine. Contact tracers encourage the use of automated monitoring during the stay at home period (e.g., text or email) whenever possible.
5. End of Quarantine: Contact submits final daily assessment and quarantine period ends. The contact receives general guidance on how to stay safe.

* May include LHD staff and/or contracted surge support staff requested by the LHD.



1. Case Investigation

Case Investigator contacts the COVID-19 confirmed case-patient to document symptoms and underlying health conditions, confirms patient was notified of positive test result, and provides isolation guidance.

Process Steps & Best Practices

- ☐ COVID-19 case investigations are initiated when the NC DHHS receives a report from a laboratory of a positive SARS-CoV-2 test result or NC DHHS or the local health department receives a report from a healthcare provider of a patient with a confirmed or probable diagnosis of COVID-19
 - *10A NCAC 41A .0101 Reportable Diseases and Conditions requires COVID-19 be immediately reported to public health.¹*
- ☐ Once a COVID-19 laboratory or provider report is received by state or local public health, this information is entered into the health department surveillance system, North Carolina Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NC EDSS).
- ☐ Case Investigator, designated by the local health department, reviews the case patient information and test results in NC EDSS.
- ☐ Case Investigator performs initial phone or digital outreach to case patient.
 - *Case Investigators perform outreach to case patient within 24 hours of case patient report to public health.²*
 - *Case Investigators document the date and time of all outreach attempts in NC EDSS notes section.*
- ☐ On the initial phone call or digital outreach to case patient, Case Investigator confirms that patient was notified of test results and documents any COVID-19 symptoms, underlying health conditions, patient locating information (residence type/location/contact information), workplace role and location.
- ☐ Case Investigator communicates isolation and monitoring guidance to case patient and makes sure they have the resources they need to safely and successfully isolate.
 - *Case Investigators place referrals for case patients with resource needs using 211 or NCCARE360.*

¹ 10A NCAC 41A .0101 Reportable Diseases and Conditions, <http://reports.oah.state.nc.us/ncac/title%2010a%20-%20health%20and%20human%20services/chapter%2041%20-%20epidemiology%20health/subchapter%20a/10a%20ncac%2041a%20.0101.html>

² CDC, Interim Guidance on Developing a COVID-19 Case Investigation & Contact Tracing Plan, Pg. 15, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/case-investigation-contact-tracing.pdf>



2. Contact Elicitation

Contacts are entered into the CCTO tool by the Case Investigator and assigned to a Contact Tracer for outreach.

Processes steps

- ☐ Case Investigator documents all the people the case patient has been in close contact with during their period of infectivity.
 - *The period of infectivity begins 48 hours prior to symptom onset if the patient is symptomatic or 48 hours prior to the day the positive specimen was collected if the patient is asymptomatic. Close contacts are defined by the CDC [here](#). Caregivers, intimate partners and household members of the patient are always considered close contact.³*
 - *Only record contacts during the period of infectivity (defined above) up to the time the patient went into isolation.*
- ☐ Case Investigator completes contact data entry in CCTO tool and documents the NC EDSS Event number for the case patient that named the contact AND the last reported date the contact was exposed to the case patient.
- ☐ Contacts are assigned to the appropriate Contact Tracer in the CCTO tool. The Contact Tracer receives the assigned contact in the CCTO tool and begins the Contact Notification process.

³ CDC, Interim Guidance on Developing a COVID-19 Case Investigation & Contact Tracing Plan, Pg. 19,
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/case-investigation-contact-tracing.pdf>



3. Contact Notification

Contact Tracers perform initial outreach via phone and digital attempts (e.g., Email, Text) to contacts who were in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Contact Tracer recommends testing, facilitating testing when needed and provides quarantine guidance.

Processes steps

- ☐ Contact Tracers will perform initial outreach via phone and digital attempts (e.g., *Email, Text*) to contacts who were in close contact with someone with COVID-19.
 - *Contact Tracers attempt outreach to contacts through different channels (via phone or digital) or in-person (if appropriate) in the primary language of the individual.⁴*
 - *Ensure culturally and linguistically appropriate communications are utilized, per CDC guidelines.⁵*
 - *Contact Tracers attempt outreach to contacts for a period of at least 4 days, before considering tracing efforts unsuccessful. Outreach attempts should be made multiple times a day at varied times to increase the likelihood of connecting with individuals (e.g., call/text during morning, afternoon and evening hours)*
 - *Document all outreach attempts in the CCTO tool.*
- ☐ Contact Tracers will attempt to document and verify as much information as possible about the contact, including demographic information, chronic medical conditions and communication preferences.
- ☐ Contact Tracers will document all interactions and information elicited from contacts in the CCTO tool including any reported self-quarantine resource needs.
 - *When resource needs are identified, Contact Tracer ensures appropriate referrals are placed, (e.g., in 211 or NCCARE360) and document all actions taken in the CCTO tool.*
- ☐ Contact Tracers will educate contacts about COVID-19 symptoms to monitor for and be instructed to promptly report any new symptoms to Local Health Departments (LHDs) and to seek medical care when necessary.
- ☐ Contacts should be advised of the need to quarantine for 14 days past the last reported exposure date to the case patient and closely monitor themselves for the onset of symptoms and get tested for COVID-19.
 - *Contact Tracer refers symptomatic contacts for COVID-19 to testing immediately and follows up with the individual to determine if testing occurred.*
 - *Contact Tracer refers asymptomatic contacts for COVID-19 testing as close as possible to 6 days after their last known exposure to the virus, or immediately upon development of any symptoms. Contact tracer follows up with the individual to determine if testing occurred.*

⁴ CDC, Interim Guidance on Developing a COVID-19 Case Investigation & Contact Tracing Plan, Pg. 23, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/case-investigation-contact-tracing.pdf>

⁵ CDC, Interim Guidance on Developing a COVID-19 Case Investigation & Contact Tracing Plan, Pg. 15, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/case-investigation-contact-tracing.pdf>



4. Contact Monitoring

The Contact Tracer should confirm and document in the CCTO tool the contact's preferred communication mode, either phone or digital (e.g., Email, Text) for any necessary communications during the quarantine period. Contact tracer conducts initial assessment for resource needs that might warrant frequent contact during isolation or quarantine period and facilitates the provisioning of those basic resources. If no needs are identified, residents should, at a minimum, be contacted again at the end of the stay home period to make sure they meet the end of isolation/quarantine criteria and can be released.

Processes steps

- ☐ Contact Tracer educates contacts about COVID-19 symptoms to monitor for and to promptly report any new symptoms to LHD via the CCTO tool or by phone, and to seek medical care when necessary.
- ☐ Contact Tracer identifies any basic resource needs of contact and makes appropriate referrals to address those needs (e.g., 2-1-1 or NCCARE360), per LHD protocols, and documents referrals in the CCTO tool.
- ☐ If contact requires frequent follow up by LHD staff during quarantine, Contact Tracer sets up digital monitoring whenever possible, allowing contact to communicate with LHD via email or text daily.
 - For contacts who require frequent LHD follow up but opt-out of digital monitoring, Contact Tracer establishes preferred time and frequency for the follow up calls.
- ☐ All contacts are given LHD phone number in case issues arise during quarantine period.
- ☐ Contact Tracers should send the contact the Symptom Self-monitoring Form if desired.
- ☐ Symptomatic contacts, regardless of test results, should be advised to follow the same criteria used for confirmed COVID-19 case patients to determine when [isolation can end](#).
 - *A second test and additional medical consultation may be needed if symptoms do not improve and the initial COVID-19 test was negative.*⁶
- ☐ If the contact tests positive for COVID-19, additional management and documentation should occur in NC EDSS. Close out the contact in the CCTO tool by changing the monitoring variable to "end monitoring", contact variable to "case" and entering the new NC EDSS ID#.
- ☐ If test is negative, monitoring continues as per the quarantine guidelines. The contact can end quarantine 14-days past the last date they were exposed to COVID-19.

⁶ CDC, Interim Guidance on Developing a COVID-19 Case Investigation & Contact Tracing Plan, Pg. 25, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/case-investigation-contact-tracing.pdf>



5. End of Quarantine

Confirmed contact completes final daily assessment or phone call and quarantine period ends. The contact receives general guidance on how to stay safe.

Processes steps

- Contacts who remain asymptomatic for 14-days after last exposure will be notified by their Contact Tracer of their release from quarantine and monitoring only after they have met the release criteria.
 - *Contact Tracers provide contacts with email/link to general health education in their primary language.⁷*
- Contact Tracers will encourage contacts who develop symptoms but test negative during their monitoring period to continue to self-quarantine and follow all recommendations from their Local Health Department (LHD) and the CDC. Furthermore, Contact Tracers will refer contacts for a second PCR screening test (*i.e., nasopharyngeal swab test*) and additional medical consultation if their symptoms do not improve.
 - *Local Health Department (LHD) use their judgement when deciding whether to release contacts from self-quarantine and should notify the contacts of their decision as soon as possible.⁸*

Resources for Local Health Department

- Requests for contact tracing support, including surge staff, can be submitted [here](https://ncgov.servicenowservices.com/sp_tracing) (https://ncgov.servicenowservices.com/sp_tracing)
- You can access the COVID-19 Contact Tracing Onboarding for NC Local Health Departments training materials [here](https://www.ncahec.net/covid-19/contact-tracing-for-local-health-departments/) (<https://www.ncahec.net/covid-19/contact-tracing-for-local-health-departments/>).
- For any other questions, please call the North Carolina Division of Public Health's (NC DPH) Communicable Disease Branch (CDB) 24/7 Epidemiologist on Call at 919-733-3419.
- You can access sample case investigation and contact tracing scripts in both English and Spanish [here](https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/lhds/manuals/cd/coronavirus.html) (<https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/lhds/manuals/cd/coronavirus.html>).
- You can access CCTO Tool Job Aids [here](https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/lhds/manuals/cd/coronavirus_CCTOjobaids.html) (https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/lhds/manuals/cd/coronavirus_CCTOjobaids.html).

Thank you for your dedication in keeping North Carolina communities safe and healthy.

⁷ CDC, Interim Guidance on Developing a COVID-19 Case Investigation & Contact Tracing Plan, Pg. 28, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/case-investigation-contact-tracing.pdf>

⁸ CDC, Interim Guidance on Developing a COVID-19 Case Investigation & Contact Tracing Plan, Pg. 28, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/case-investigation-contact-tracing.pdf>